

INFO	LOG-00	AF-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00
	PERC-00	PDI-00	DS-00	DHSE-00	FBIE-00	VCJ-00	H-00
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	MOFM-00	MOF-00
	VCIE-00	NSAE-00	NIMA-00	PM-00	DOHS-00	FMPC-00	SP-00
	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	NCTC-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
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SUBJECT: COALITION TEETERS - WILL CAPTAIN BASESCU SAVE THE SHIP?

Classified By: DCM Jeri Guthrie-Corn, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. PM Emil Boc's September 28 announcement that he intended to replace Interior Minister and Deputy PM Dan Nica has led to a potential showdown between the coalition members in the current government, the Liberal Democratic Party (PDL) which Boc chairs and the Social Democratic Party (PSD) of which Nica is a member. Boc gave PSD 24 hours to nominate a replacement for Nica, while the PSD countered by affirming full support for Nica and threatening to pull its ministers from Cabinet if the PM did not change his mind within 24 hours. As both deadlines expired on September 29, President Traian Basescu stepped in as a "neutral mediator" and summoned PM Boc and PSD leader Mircea Geoana (Basescu's main rival for the presidency) to the presidential palace to resolve the crisis and preserve the coalition. It is unlikely that Boc would have provoked this crisis without Basescu's approval, and Basescu may well have orchestrated the entire affair to enhance his image as a unifying force in advance of the November 22 presidential election. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In announcing his plans to sack Nica, Boc cited mismanagement of the Interior Ministry and Nica's accusation last week that PDL was preparing to rig the presidential election. Early on September 29 the PM gave PSD an explicit deadline of 1:00 pm to nominate a suitable replacement for Nica from PSD ranks. When the deadline expired, Boc forwarded the dismissal request to President Basescu and nominated PDL Secretary General and Regional Development Minister Vasile Blaga as Nica's interim replacement. Many local pundits believe the PSD covets control of Interior because the ministry has its own intelligence unit; a high ranking operative admitted earlier month that information provided by the service would be used in the campaign against the PDL and Basescu.

¶3. (C) For its part, PSD leader Mircea Geoana has strongly defended Nica and accused Boc and Basescu of a blatant political move to discredit a prominent PSD member while at the same time boosting Basescu's own image. Geoana issued his counter ultimatum shortly after Boc's announcement, saying that all PSD ministers would leave the Cabinet. All of PSD's cabinet members pledged to carry out Geoana's threat if Nica is indeed dismissed, while senior PSD leaders past and present blasted Boc and Basescu publicly for violating both the PSD/PDL coalition agreement and Romania's constitution. However, most commentators continue to doubt that PSD would actually leave the coalition, as local PSD leaders have made clear to the national party leadership that they have no interest in giving up the resources and patronage that come with being "in government."

¶4. (C) In a September 30 meeting with Ambassador, PSD leader Geoana noted that his party could have withdrawn its ministers and allowed a government of "technocrats" (the caretaker option). However, Geoana also admitted that while this option might help his personal presidential campaign it would certainly not be in the national interest.

¶5. (U) Although the constitution gives the Prime Minister the right to recall Cabinet ministers and nominate replacements, subject to presidential approval, the current crisis does indeed go to the heart of the coalition agreement. If neither side gives ground and PSD dissolves the coalition, PM Boc will have to submit a new Cabinet for parliamentary approval. As it is unlikely that PDL could form a new parliamentary majority this close to the election without PSD, it is likely that Boc would lead a caretaker minority government until the next president took office and sought to form a new government of his own liking.

¶6. (C) Upon receiving written Boc's recall of Nica, President Basescu summoned Boc and Geoana to the presidential palace to resolve the crisis. Almost simultaneously presidential staff announced that Basescu would give a nationally televised press conference. Basescu emerged from the meeting alone and issued a public appeal to both PSD and PDL to resolve their differences and keep the coalition intact "for the good of the nation." In his best non-partisan and statesmanlike manner, Basescu said he would withhold action on Nica's dismissal and recommended that if Nica left office PM Boc should nominate either another PSD candidate or a "neutral technocrat" - not a PDL politician such as Blaga whose appointment would only increase distrust between the parties. He urged the PDL and PSD to identify solutions and scolded them for having unduly discredited the work of the Interior Ministry.

¶7. (C) Comment. We find it hard to believe that Boc would have taken such a precipitous step as firing Nica without Basescu's prior approval, and Basescu's performance in front of the cameras certainly burnished his image as a neutral arbiter above the partisan fray. The PDL clearly has the upper hand for now, as it seems PSD must accept Nica's dismissal, albeit with a less extreme replacement than Blaga. PSD's only alternative would be to dissolve the coalition and take the blame for, in Basescu's words, "superimposing a political crisis over the economic crisis we already face." By leaving government, Geoana would also be depriving the local party bosses of important patronage positions on the eve on the election campaign - never a good option for a presidential candidate but particularly dangerous in PSD, where the national leadership is particularly dependent on local party machines for support. Nevertheless, no one in the media seems to believe that this was anything but political theater, leaving it uncertain whether the manufactured crisis will actually help Basescu at the polls.

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